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ABSTRACT

This report is part of a study of school districts in British Columbia (Canada), and deals with school district ethos--interest in defined focal areas--both as a measure of school district quality and as a potential predictor of student achievement. The study concentrates on one of these focal areas--holding schools accountable through monitoring. School accountability and the relationship between the school and the district were examined in a sample of 10 representative districts. All line administrators, from one to three for each district, were interviewed, as were all principals of small districts and a third of the principals of larger districts. Three districts were characterized by a strong district presence in the schools; these also were considered high-performing on measures of achievement, including standardized test scores. Three districts lacked the school assessment programs of the first three districts, but did have a limited set of accountability practices. One of these districts was medium-performing and two were high-performing. Two districts lacked district pressure for school accountability, and these were both low-performing. One high-performing district and one low-performing district had a weak district presence in the schools, with one shared monitoring goal. Overall, districts that were high-performing were more interested in school accountability and had more sophisticated procedures for monitoring school accountability. Eight tables present the data about district practices. (SLD)

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"QUALITY CONTROL":

School Accountability and District Ethos

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This report is one of a series describing an extensive study of school districts in British Columbia, Canada. Our research generally has been concerned with the notion of school district ethos, both as a measure of district quality and as a potential predictor of student achievement. Our interest in district ethos was stimulated by the results of an examination of a number of district status variables and their possible associations with district effectiveness, efficiency, size, and location (Coleman & LaRocque, 1984; Coleman, 1986a, 1986b).

After controlling for the effects of community educational level, a proxy for family environment (Walberg & Marjoribanks, 1979), there still remained extensive differences in aggregated student achievement between districts. Such resource variables as costs per student were negatively associated with these achievement variations (Coleman, 1986a, 1986b), while PTR was positively associated. When the effects of PTR variations on costs were partialled out, however, there was no significant relationship between residualized costs per pupil and residualized achievement. Thus non-resource district characteristics which might be related to achievement seemed potentially quite important.

We have used the terms "district effectiveness" and "district performance" to refer respectively to performance on achievement measures and to performance on both achievement and cost measures. For us, these descriptors do not provide adequate criteria of quality (Coleman, 1986a). Sirotnick (1984) has suggested that "outcome-bound models" of schooling tend to ignore organizational work climate, "yet

the work environment (structural, behavioral, and perceptual) can be seen as permeating these models and serving as an antecedent, mediating mechanism" (p. 231). We agree, but we have adopted Rutter's (1979) term "ethos" as more closely aligned to our conception. A comprehensive notion of district quality must include at least consideration of the "ethos" prevailing in the district, both in its potential for influencing important outcomes, and as an end in itself (particularly from the point of view of the educators within the system).

We suggest that a positive district ethos consists of a high degree of interest in and concern about six activity and attitude "focusses": taking care of business; monitoring performance; changing/adapting policies and practices; consideration/caring for stakeholders; creating shared values; and creating community support. The first three focusses are task-oriented; the latter three are "affective" in nature. The general nature of these focusses is suggested in Table 1, which also demonstrates how they may be linked to parallel school and classroom level issues. (See Coleman, 1986a, for more detailed discussion.)

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The notion of school district ethos is examined more fully in Table 2, where each of the six district-level focusses is considered in terms of three broad district tasks. The cells of the resulting matrix constitute descriptions of the work of district administrators, and also

of a set of beliefs about important features of the role. For us they constitute the general research questions which guided data collection and analysis in our study of school district norms and practices.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

This report deals with the second of the six components of school district ethos, a focus on holding schools accountable. The three general research questions are:

* how are schools held accountable for their performance?
* what changes have been made to improve school accountability practices? and
* what is the relationship between monitoring and instructional goals?

Perspectives on "Quality Control"

"Monitoring performance" as a general activity (Table 1) means an administrative focus on accountability. In particular at the district level it means holding schools accountable for academic and other kinds of performance. The notion of holding students accountable for behavior and performance through close monitoring is common in the classroom management and school effects literature (Anderson, Evertson, & Emmer, 1980; Evertson & Emmer, 1982; Mackenzie, 1983). Similarly, an emphasis on teacher accountability via supervision is a staple in the administrative literature (Bridges, 1986). The notion of school

accountability is less common in Canada and the U.S., although the subject of a large-scale research program in Great Britain.

Boyd and Crowson (1981) have identified accountability for performance, in general, as part of a paradigm shift in administrative studies. Cuban (1984) has raised the specific issue of school accountability in the context of district improvement. Murphy, Hallinger, and Peterson (1985) have described principal supervision as an important part of the responsibilities of superintendents in high-achieving districts. The emphasis in the districts they studied, however, was on personnel supervision based on personal goal attainment, rather than holding principals accountable for school performance.

Here we will describe administrative activities at the district level which are associated with school accountability, and hence possibly with district achievement levels exceeding predictions.

Focus on the School

There are currently few instances in the U.S. of district-level uses of monitoring data in comprehensive ways (Kean, 1983). In fact such an approach can be considered inappropriate in loosely coupled systems (Weick, 1976) or professional bureaucracies (Mintzberg, 1979), which are characterized by continuing "negotiations" (Corwin & Borman, 1988) between schools and central administrators about autonomy and constraints and in which "managing uncertainty" (McPherson, Crowson, & Pitner, 1986) about means-ends relationships is the critical management problem.

The recent Snyder and Anderson (1986) text on Managing Productive Schools contains a chapter describing "The Management Subsystem:

Quality Control," but this is perceived as largely an internal school affair, with only the periodic visits of an external review team to carry the responsibility of holding the school accountable for performance to district level management. Such approaches reflect a considerable and appropriate concern for school autonomy. The strengths of such accountability schemes, however, are also their weaknesses: highly individualized school evaluations make comparative judgments impossible, and raise serious problems of validity and reliability. That is, such evaluations do not allow objective performance judgments to be made.

Yet the case for treating the school as the unit of improvement seems strong: Goodlad, a major advocate, asserts the "the most promising unit of selection in seeking to mount and maintain programs providing quality and equitable education is the individual school" (1987, p. 13). Sirotnick has extended this idea to the issue of evaluation and argues that "evaluation becomes the process of rigorous self-examination, indeed the process of school renewal itself" (1987, p. 42). Schools need district and other kinds of support for this activity, which is essentially the "production of critical knowledge through the process of critical inquiry" (Sirotnick, 1987, p. 51). Accountability is transformed into responsibility in this system, and "such level-to-level monitoring as is deemed minimally necessary should focus on whether adequate mechanisms for assuring responsible performance are in place" (Goodlad, 1987, p. 13).

Advocates of more traditional approaches to school accountability such as School-based Management and Management-by-Objectives argue that

school autonomy and "loose coupling" are desirable with respect to means: "every decision which contributes to the instructional effectiveness of the school, and which can be made at school level, should be made at schoo level" (Coleman, 1984, p. 25). The role of the district is supportive: "the task of central office personnel then becomes to provide support and assistance to these schools, in an effort to help the schools to develop their autonomy, and then improve their quality" (p. 34).

But in the school-based management approach described by Coleman school autonomy with respect to ends is more limited. He maintains that the support and assistance provided by the school district to schools must include the monitoring of results by collecting data annually on a variety of measures of school quality and providing these data to the schools. He argues from experience that "the longitudinal data are very useful in showing minor fluctuations in school quality" and "the indicators of school quality vary together" (Coleman, 1984, p. 34). This scheme envisages broad measures of quality, as does Goodlad, but school autonomy is limited by broad district goals and expectations. These in turn are limited by the expectations of provincial governments.

The Goodlad proposal for school-level autonomy with responsibility, and the Coleman description of school-level autonomy with accountability differ in that Goodlad wishes to free the school from accountability to district and state levels, while Coleman wishes to limit school autonomy with respect to goals by asserting a basic form of accountability. Pupil achievement and per pupil costs have been described by Levin

(1974) as comprising the simplest form of accountability, performance reporting.

As we have noted elsewhere (Coleman & LaRocque, 1984; 1986), the criteria used by provincial and state governments in assessing school districts have been effectiveness and efficiency, and equity to a lesser extent. Districts unable to meet these criteria have often disappeared in reorganizations. Mitchell and Encarnation (1984) list seven policy mechanisms which state governments use to advance their goals. Very recently in British Columbia, districts which were unable to meet spending targets were placed under trusteeship, a rather drastic mechanism not listed by Mitchell and Encarnation. The Coleman autonomy/accountability mix is more consistent with these constraints. It is also much less acceptable to teachers than the Goodlad approach.

The two approaches to quality control identified in the literature can be labelled "autonomy with accountability" (Coleman) and the "autonomy with responsibility" (Goodlad). After the presentation of data regarding current practices in B.C. school districts, these two possible approaches will be reconsidered.

Methodological Considerations

The general methodology parallels that of most of the effective schools research: Given a sample of districts contrasting in respect to some important outcomes, is it possible to identify differences in district ethos and associated policies and practices within the group which might help to account for the variance in outcomes? To be

convincing, such differences in ethos must at least vary across the sample consistently with the variance in outcomes.

As importantly, the detailed data on ethos differences between districts should allow the later development of a conceptual framework linking ethos and outcome which has an empirical rather than an inferential basis. This will permit testing by other researchers, preferably using other methodologies in other settings. Since our work is based on an inferential conceptual framework the approach we have taken is necessarily exploratory and descriptive. The intent was to test the utility of the framework to guide efforts to describe district norms and practices rather than to test hypotheses.

Sample of Districts

In British Columbia, the western-most province of Canada, there are 75 school districts (local administrative units) which in 1984 ranged in size from about 400 to over 50,000 pupils. With a few exceptions, each has a locally appointed district superintendent, who is responsible for the administration of education. Each district also has an elected school board, responsible for policy-level decisions such as budget development and some curricular matters. At present, district budgets are established by the Ministry of Education, which also retains some control over curriculum and such operational matters as the school calendar and personnel practices.

Ten districts comprise the sample for this report. They are representative in four respects: residual scores and costs, district size (Peterson, 1984), and type of community (rural/urban location; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985).

Aggregating performance data to the district level raises a number of serious methodological issues, as yet unresolved (Hannan, Freeman, & Meyer, 1976; Sirotnick & Burstein, 1985). The debate concerns use of aggregated student data and the sources of variance in achievement. Bidwell and Kasarda (1975) used aggregated student data in their analysis of district effects. Their critics, advocating the use of individual student data, with school and district identification, argue that the individual is major source of variance and hence "the appropriate level of analysis." The fact that interdistrict variance is greater than interschool variance in the work of Bidwell and Kasarda illustrates to these critics the errors in using aggregated data (Hannan, Freeman, & Meyer, 1976, p. 142).

A second critique argues that "the variance in student achievement lying between districts quite probably would be substantially less than that lying between schools" and is not "sufficiently large to warrant serious attention" (Alexander & Griffin, 1976, p. 145). Yet the data they provide, using an analysis based on individual data, shows that roughly 5 to 10% of the variance in achievement lies between districts.

Advocates of the use of aggregated data argue that the use of individualized data necessarily ignores collective sources of variance which are important but not easily identified, such as reading group (which, according to Barr and Drebeen (1982), is the single most important source of variance in achievement in elementary schools) and secondary school track (Alexander, Cook, & McDill, 1978). Analyses based on individual scores discount variance from such sources. There is a general tendency to undervalue contextual or collective sources of

variance (Barr & Drebeen, 1983, pp. 22, 41). On the other hand, "the aggregation of learning outcomes to the school level ((or higher)) biases findings toward the identification of productive conditions at that level" (Barr & Drebeen, 1983, p. 68).

For our purposes, we needed an achievement measure which was modestly longitudinal since district effectiveness probably fluctuates; broad with respect to both subjects and grades; and relatively independent of province-wide shifts in achievement. Precision in reporting, for example, achievement in mathematics amongst the students of the province was less important than an accurate representation of the relative standing of districts in the province.

The nine test scores available from provincial test batteries given to all students in the appropriate age cohort between 1981 and 1984 were: Science--Grades 4, 8 and 12; Reading--Grades 4, 7 and 10; and Mathematics--Grades 4, 8 and 12. The cost data were taken from school district budgets. (See Coleman & LaRocque, 1984, for details.)

When these data were reported at the district level of aggregation, there were two school districts which were extreme outliers with respect to achievement (and community education level). These were removed from the sample to allow a regression calculation appropriate for the remaining 73 school districts. Our procedure with the achievement data was to standardize and aggregate the test scores, and calculate a residual using Community Education Level (the percent of families with some post-secondary education) as a predictor. This is the strongest available proxy for family environment (Walberg & Marjoribanks, 1976) available as a predictor of achievement in B.C. (Coleman, 1986a). The

resulting measure is Residual Achievement, a broad and probably somewhat overstated measure of district impact on student test scores.

It was necessary to transform the cost data by using the reciprocal to reduce skewness. The standardized and transformed 1982 per pupil costs were residualized with District Mean Grade Size, an important predictor of costs over which the district has little control (Coleman, 1987; Coleman & LaRocque, 1986). The Pearson correlation between residual achievement and residual costs was -.29 ($p = .01$). This finding differs sharply from that of Bidwell and Kasarda (1975), and slightly from that of other studies of costs and achievement at the district level, which tend to find no significant relationship (Childs & Shakeshaft, 1986). Most other studies use raw cost data, rather than discretionary (residualized) cost data, with the effect of reducing cost variances between districts.

We then rank-ordered the districts by Residual Achievement and Residual Costs, and selected for our sample the ten districts listed in Table 3. Table 3 also summarizes various characteristics of these districts, and illustrates the correspondence between rankings on residual achievement and residual costs suggested by the Pearson correlation. We have called districts with a high residual score and a low residual cost "high-performing," and districts with a low residual score and a high residual cost, "low-performing." District performance level is given in the last column of Table 3.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

District R is located in a small city in the Interior of the province, and serves the rural area surrounding the city. District Q is a largely resource-based town, on a major highway, with most of the schools in town and close together. District W is quite rural, although it also contains a small town. Many of the schools serve small villages some way from any city.

District V is centred on a large city, but serves a considerable rural area, and has a wide variety of types and sizes of schools. District J is in a relatively remote area, with very scattered schools, some of which are quite large. District P serves an economically diverse community, with several small towns, some of which are tourist-oriented. District B is suburban/rural, near a major city. The schools tend to be large and close together, but the area has grown recently and rapidly, and is suffering from planning difficulties.

District H consists of a single high school and a group of small and scattered feeder elementary schools, serving a resource-based community quite near a larger centre. District M is a rather affluent small city, with a long (for British Columbia) history. The schools are close together and quite large. District C is an isolated community, with very small schools and a substantial native Indian population.

Data Collection

The major method of data collection was the interview. All line administrators in the district--that is, the superintendent, assistant superintendents, directors, and supervisors--were interviewed. For the districts in the sample, this represented one to three individuals. All the principals in the smaller districts were interviewed. About one-third of the principals in the larger districts were interviewed, chosen to represent a variety of school types (e.g., elementary and secondary), sizes, and locations (e.g., in-town and out-of-town). Principals with fewer than three years service in the district were excluded, on the grounds that they might not be fully familiar with district practices. There were no district administrators with fewer than three years in the district.

The audio-taped interview consisted of thirty-two relatively broad and open-ended questions, and took 90 to 150 minutes to complete. One or more interview questions plus some possible probes were developed for each cell in Table 2. They were designed to elicit as complete and as accurate descriptions of district norms and practices as possible. There was an additional question on fiscal decision-making and monitoring. Comparable questions were asked of all respondents, although the wording differed slightly to be meaningful to the different groups of respondents. The district and school administrator responses to the following interview questions--corresponding to cells 2.ACC, 2.CH, and 2.EXP of Table 2 respectively--constitute the data pool for this report:

* How does your district hold schools accountable for their performance?
* What important changes is this district presently making in the area of monitoring and reporting? and
* What are the district's most important monitoring goals and what specifically is being done this year in pursuit of them?

The preparation of the interview guides was influenced considerably by Gorden (1975) and Lortie (1975).

The interview ended with an invitation to the respondents to discuss any other information they felt we should know about the district. Most respondents said that the interview had covered the important aspects of district practice. The others elaborated their descriptions of the political context--nearly all of these responses were captured by the coding schedules.

The interviewers asked the respondents to clarify, elaborate, and give specific examples whenever necessary. If a respondent's answer to a question was short, the interviewer probed for further information, to give the respondents every opportunity to recall and describe district practices. When the respondents appeared to feel uncomfortable in the face of such probing, it was discontinued. A major inference, basic to the study, follows from this: Since the respondents were given several opportunities to mention relevant district policies and practices in each area, those not mentioned were not salient in the minds of the respondents, and thus not important in the district.

Data Analysis

All the information pertaining to each interview question provided by each of the respondents was compiled into a single file per district. Next a coding schedule was prepared, based on the data. This involved numerous readings of all the transcripts to identify the major themes and subthemes. These themes and subthemes were then used in coding the comments of each respondent. Generally it required several attempts to develop a satisfactory coding schedule, that is, one in which the themes and subthemes (a) were well-defined, distinct, and easily recognizable by the coders, (b) permitted the coders to code most of what the respondents said, and (c) were applicable to all ten districts. The approach to data analysis was influenced by Guba and Lincoln (1981), Spradley (1979), and especially by Miles and Huberman (1984).

To ensure coding reliability, each interview was coded independently by two coders, neither of whom was one of the co-investigators who conducted all the interviews and wrote the reports. Inter-rater reliability scores for the coding of each question are shown, by district, in Table 4.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Next, district summaries which reflected the percentage of respondents to whom each code had been assigned were prepared. In these district summaries ++ indicates that a code was assigned to at least 2/3

of the respondents; + indicates that a code was assigned to 1/3 to 2/3 of the respondents; - indicates that a code was assigned to fewer than 1/3 of the respondents; and DA indicates that a code was assigned to at least 2/3 of the district administrators but fewer than 1/3 of the principals. If a code failed either to characterize at least one of the districts or to distinguish between districts, it was dropped from the coding schedule.

Several techniques were used to maximize the "trustworthiness" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) of the data. One technique was to seek clarification and elaboration of responses throughout the interview session and to summarize to the respondent's satisfaction at the end of each set of questions, in order to be sure we understood what the respondent was saying. Another was to assess the overall plausibility or credibility of a respondent's account in terms of its internal consistency, bases for assertions, certainty of assertions, amount of detail, and the like. (Only one respondent's account failed to meet this test.)

The main technique, however, was triangulation. This took two forms: the comparison of responses of different respondents, and in particular, of different groups of respondents, within a district; and the comparison of interview data with those contained in various documents such as policy manuals, teacher handbooks, and agendas/minutes of Administrators' Meetings. The greater the consistency in response revealed by these comparisons, the more confident we could be in the inferences drawn about district norms and practices. In addition, inferences made in reference to one cell were examined in the light of

inferences made in reference to other cells, to see whether or not they made sense, given all the information available about the district.

Data Presentation

The district summaries for cells 2.ACC, 2.CH, and 2.EXP are reported in Tables 5, 6, and 7, which also list the categories of responses inferred from the interview data and used in coding.

The findings are discussed separately for each research question, and then the response patterns are combined to give an overall sense of the variations between districts. The discussion emphasizes those elements which discriminate between districts. The illustrative quotations (identified by a suffix showing the district and speaker) are, unless otherwise noted, broadly representative of a group of answers on the same issue. Most were selected from the transcripts of principals, because their perspective is probably a better indicator of the degree of routinization of a practice than that of the district administrators.

How Districts Hold Schools Accountable

The first element of Focus 2 concerns how schools are held accountable for their performance by district administrators. Seven different practices were identified from the interview data. School performance data, particularly test results, were at the heart of each of these practices--whether it involved providing data, discussing data, articulating expectations for the use of data, or monitoring school use of the data. The school accountability practices characteristic of the districts in the sample are shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

School Accountability Practices

Providing school-specific test results was the only practice mentioned in all ten districts. The Ministry of Education had just started to report government exam and Provincial Learning Assessment (PLAP) results by school, and in all districts the majority of respondents mentioned that this information was given to the principals.

> The schools receive the same package of PLAP results that we [i.e., the district administrators] receive. (H1.01)

In addition, many of the districts administered one or more standardized tests to all students in selected grade levels and the principals were told how their school had performed on these tests as well.

> We get feedback on the CAT from the point of view of our school. (B2.04)
>
> The district administrators give principals their school PLAP and CAT results. (M2.02)

Frequently the principals were not only given school-specific test results, but also information about how their school performed in comparison to the other schools in the district, or to provincial or national norms.

> Each school knows how well it does on PLAP relative to the other schools in the district and relative to the province. And in the light of those results we examine our own programs in the school. . . . And we know how we stand [on the McGinity Test and the Otis Test] with district and national norms. (R2.04)
>
> We get the statistical analysis on the district tests which includes the mean and standard deviation and distribution of the

> scores from A through F for our school as compared to the district. Come to think of it, on the district tests we actually get the breakdown for each school, but with the names deleted, so we can see how other schools are doing. (V2.03)

The concern for confidentiality suggested in the second quote was very common throughout the interview data. Great care was taken to ensure that no one outside of the school staff knew how that school performed--no other educator, and certainly no member of the public.

Only half the districts had a school self-assessment program, and only three of these required the self-assessment report to be submitted for district administrator feedback.

> Our school self-assessment report was passed on to the District Office. They usually want to hear about it. We sit down and discuss it with them and follow up on our own recommendations. (R2.01)

> The [self-assessment] report goes to our Assistant Superintendent and to the Director responsible for our zone. . . . The reports are looked at--we've had feedback this year that suggests that each one was looked at thoroughly, because specific points were addressed. (V2.06)

> The SWAT teams [i.e., external school assessment teams] delve into many aspect of the school, and they let you know if you are not on track. The SWAT team comes in and goes through our self-evaluation report, then checks to see if it is consistent with what they find. The SWAT team writes a draft report after their week-long visit to the school. They discuss the draft report paragraph by paragraph with the principal and staff before writing the final report. (J2.07)

In many districts the principals were not simply sent a report of their school's performance. Instead a district administrator visited the school and discussed the results with the principal, and sometimes the staff, in person.

> District-wide the Central Office, with the principals, reviews the results of PLAPs and provincial exams and CTBS--discusses them with principals as a group, then follows up the nitty-gritty with individual principals in private. So, for example, if there is a

> problem in my school with algebra or some damn thing, nobody knows about it except B. [the Superintendent] and me. And then I carry on with the teacher. (J2.01)

> Usually when the provincial exam results come in, then I sit down with R. [the Superintendent] and G. [the Assistant Superintendent] and we go over them and analyse them for strengths and weaknesses. Then I'd take the same information back to my staff and we'd go over it. (W2.06)

Another common district practice was the articulation of expectations concerning the purposes of monitoring and the intended uses of performance data. It was mentioned in all the districts whose testing program had been operating for at least three years. These expectations are discussed later, in the section on monitoring goals.

In some districts there was a routinized procedure to ensure that performance data, particularly test data, were actually considered by the staff in goal-setting and decision-making.

> There was certainly a concern in the district because some domains in the math PLAP were . . . below the provincial average--they should be at or above the provincial average. There were no specific mandates. The follow up was handled by the Central Office through principals' objectives. . . . We have to sit down and discuss them with the Central Office. It is at this time that they say, "It looks like a district priority for gifted or for improving the math results is not included in your objectives. What are you doing in these areas?" (W2.08)

> Last year when we sat down to discuss our school objectives, the Superintendent had a copy of the school CAT results. If there was something that needed attention that showed up in the test results, [he] looked to see how we dealt with it in our school objectives. (P2.04)

The seventh practice, and the one that logically falls last, was to follow up implementation of school plans for improvement, to see if they had actually taken place and whether or not they were successful.

> I have to answer to the Superintendent in April or May as to how we made out, how successful we were in achieving our [school] objectives. (P2.06)

> We are expected to have a school committee look at our PLAP results and interpret them on a school-wide basis and submit a report to the Superintendent. There are periodic visits from the Assistant Superintendent assigned to this school. He always has a number of prepared questions, and invariably one of them will be on that particular topic. . . . I show him our report and our recommendations, and then am very specific about what we've done. (B2.05)

District Approaches to School Accountability

As Table 5 shows, the districts differed with respect to which and how many of these practices characterized their approach to school accountability. Some districts did adopt rather similar approaches to school accountability, however, and it is possible to identify four approaches, the first two of which are very closely related.

Group 1 Approach. Districts R, J, and V were characterized by a strong district presence in the schools. They established a comprehensive set of practices to make schools accountable for their performance. The district administrators provided the principals with a variety of school-specific performance data; they discussed these data with them and set expectations for their use; and they monitored, through recognized procedures, how and with what success the schools use the performance data. There are several interesting features of this approach that deserve comment, as they help us to understand how these practices contributed to school accountability.

It is possible to imagine these school accountability practices being carried out in any number of ways. For example, principals could have been required to go to the Board Office to learn their school's test results or they could have been told the results over the telephone, yet neither of these possibilities was ever mentioned.

Instead, the school accountability practices invariably were structured so that (a) they involved direct personal contact between the principal and a district administrator, and (b) they took place in the principal's office rather than at the Board Office. In other words, the manner in which the school accountability practices were conducted placed high demands on district administrator time and effort. This feature may have signalled to the other professionals in the district the seriousness with which the issue of school accountability was taken. It may also have conveyed respect for the role of the principal and recognition of the importance of treating each school as an unique entity.

The district administrators used their time in the schools purposefully, to engage the principals in discussion on specific topics--school performance data, improvement plans, and the implementation of these plans. This meant that the district administrators had to well-prepared for these meetings, a further demand on their time and effort. But such focussed, well-informed discussion probably served to remind the principals that the district administrators knew what was happening in the schools. As a consequence of the considerable amount of time the district administrators spent in the schools, moreover, they became increasingly familiar with the progress and circumstances of each school, a fact of which the principals must have been aware.

In spite of the emphasis on school test results, the nature of the discussions was collaborative rather than prescriptive. The district administrators ackowledged good performance. They helped the principals

to interpret the data and to identify strengths and weaknesses, and they offerred advice and support when necessary. Ultimately, however, plans for improvement were left up to the principal and staff of each schools--this point was stressed by the principals--although their progress in developing and implementing these plans was monitored. The features of collaboration and relative school autonomy probably reinforced the perception of respect for the role of the principal and recognition of the importance of treating each school as an unique entity

Although the school accountability practices were distinct, they were interdependent--e.g., school goals were influenced by test data, test data were examined during school assessment, accomplishment of school goals was made the focus of school visits. This meant that there was a cohesiveness to what was required of the schools. Every activity fit into the overall pattern, and so had meaning beyond the task itself.

In spite of the fact that the district administrators kept the schools under close scrutiny, this approach to school accountability was neither oppressive nor dictatorial. Instead, one is given the impression of a group of professionals who shared a common purpose and who played different, but complementary, roles in the achievement of the desired outcomes.

Group 2 Approach. Districts B, P and W were very similar to Districts R, J, and V. They also had established a comprehensive set of school accountability practices-- provision of a variety of school-specific performance data, face-to-face discussion of these data, articulation of expectations, and follow-up of use of performance

data--resulting in a strong district district presence in the schools. The major difference concerned the issue of school assessment. Districts R, J, and V had successfully instituted a school self-assessment process which provided for an external review of the report prepared by the school staff. In fact, the school assessment process in District J also involved separate assessment by an external team, and Districts R and V were moving in that direction as well. None of the second group of districts had a district-wide program of school self-assessment.

External review of the school's self-assessment report, especially in conjunction with an external assessment, required considerable time and effort on the part of the district administrators, which might account for its infrequency. It did, however, have a major advantage, as the Superintendent of District J explains:

> I like the school assessment process because it gives E. [the Assistant Superintendent] and myself a good chance to have a close look at schools on a regular basis. It keeps us in touch with what is happening in far more detail than we would otherwise get. (J1.01)

The district administrators in R, J, and V spent a lot of time in the schools anyway, but the school assessment program provided them with another important opportunity to keep abreast of conditions in the schools. Furthermore, it permitted them to examine an array of information (e.g., test data, survey data, program reviews) about one or more aspects of the school at the same time.

There were two other noteworthy consequences of a school assessment program. Not only did the district administrators know how a school was performing and the probable reasons for its performance level, but the

principal and staff knew that they did. This must have had an effect on how they conducted the school assessment, interpreted the results, and implemented the recommendations. The school assessment program also provided an additional opportunity for the district administrators to encourage the school in its efforts, and to offer support and guidance.

Group 3 Approach. In contrast to the districts already described, there was a weak district presence in Districts Q and C, but this can be accounted for by their circumstances. Both districts were very small and had only one educational administrator, the Superintendent, in the Central Office. This obviously limited the district influence at the school level, as one principal explains:

> There is less district initiative here than in other districts I am used to, which I think is due very simply to the factor of size. . . . It is virtually impossible for the Superintendent to start much. . . . The principals here tend to take on quite a bit of the role that a Superintendent might take on in other places in terms of self-analysis and so forth. (C2.01)

What influence there was seemed to operate mainly through two mechanisms. The first was a heavy reliance on test data. The Superintendent oversaw the annual administration of a standardized test in District Q. The initiative originally came from the elementary school principals in District C, but

> I think there is an expectation now, since it has been a number of years that both the elementary schools have used the Stanford tests, that this be continued. I think that should anybody stop it, questions would be asked. (C2.03)

The second was a strong sense of accountability, which was expressed by all the principals, but which was not attributed to the Superintendent and the Board as it was in some of the other districts.

Except for these two mechanisms, the responsibility for school accountability appeared to rest primarily with the principals. While the principals in District Q did talk about using test data to identify weaknesses and plan improvements, they did so only within the context of the school--there was no reference to monitoring by the Superintendent. In District C

> The Board and Superintendent are kept advised of the progress of the schools by the principals with tests results, staff analysis of test results, general progress reports--that sort of thing is brought to the Board's attention. General comments and general recommendations are made, but there is no sort of formal way of doing that at the district level. I think that the schools are very careful to keep the district staff and Board and consulted all the way along the line. (C2.03)

All the principals in District C and half of those in District Q were recent appointments. Given the time severe restrictions faced by these two Superintendents, it was not surprising that their approach to school accountability was to select principals who shared important values, to ensure that they had some reliable school performance data, and then to rely on them to "take care of business" (see Coleman & LaRocque, 1988).

Group 4 Approach. Districts H and M were characterized by an absence of press for school accountability. This was manifested in four ways.

First, the district administrators provided the schools with little or no data in addition to what was provided by the Ministry (although this might have been changing--see the next section). Furthermore, there was little concern for using test data as an indicator of school performance.

> The Provincial exams are the only sort of yardstick with any consistency--how our district is functioning compared to others is brought out. (M2.02)

> The value of test results . . . is not in distinguishing between schools, but to the classroom teacher. (M1.01)

As long as the emphasis was on district performance or individual student performance, there were no defensible grounds on which to advocate that a school make a particular change.

There were no established structures to ensure that the district administrators discussed performance data with the principals individually. In fact, there was little evidence that this practice occurred.

> The high school results are always discussed [at the Administrators' Meeting]. Other than that it is very difficult to get specifics. We always spend some time discussing the Language Arts results but they aren't specific to the school level. Other than that, nothing. (M2.05)

> The PLAP results were shown to me by a district administrator, with no comment. I discussed them with the appropriate department head, again with no pressure. (M2.01)

The absence of this practice not only meant that the district administrators missed an opportunity to let the principals know that they knew what was happening in the school. It meant that they also missed an opportunity both to reinforce expectations concerning performance data and to provide support and guidance to the principals in the interpretation of the data and the planning of improvements. It is not surprising, then, that there were no shared expectations with respect to the use of performance data.

Finally, there were no established structures to ensure that the district administrators monitor how and with what success the schools

made use of performance data. Couple this with the absence of expectations, and it was unlikely that performance data would have had much impact on school staff activities.

District "History" of School Accountability Practices

The second element of Focus 2 concerns recent district changes in school accountability practices. In addition to the substantive nature of the change, the extent of the change--i.e, whether it was the introduction of a new practice or the modification of an existing practice--and the time frame of the change--i.e., whether it was a planned change, a change that had occurred within the last year or two, or a change that had occurred within the last three or four years--must also be taken into consideration. These three factors constitute a district "history" of school accountability practices, which is summarized for each of the districts in the sample in Table 6.

TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

Changes to Promote School Accountability

The simplest and most frequently mentioned change concerned the administration of standardized tests. A district testing program was in the planning stages in District H.

> We'll be giving CTBS next year. (H2.04)

Some districts had just recently introduced a testing program.

> I think that in the last four years there has been a more organized way of collecting test results. . . . The Stanford is not as comprehensive a battery of tests as CTBS. . . . We [the two elementary school principals] wanted to zero in on vocabulary, comprehension, and math skills. (C2.03)

One district had modified its testing program.

> We changed changed the type of test, from CTBS to CAT. (P2.02)

Finally, some districts were planning to expand their testing program.

> CAT was started about a year ago. . . . In future it will include grades 4 and 6. We extended CAT to the other grades so that all teachers would be inserviced on the interpretation of the results. (M1.03)

Several districts had recently introduced some form of a goal review process.

> School growth plans have been a focus of our Administrators' Association for the last year or two. (B2.06)

> Three years ago the Superintendent instituted the idea of a deadline for sending school goals to his office and he in turn reacts to them and comes out and asks for comment. He has done that for three years in a row to my knowledge. That's worked fairly well. (W2.04)

Principal evaluation was a new practice in a couple of districts.

> In previous years principals were infrequently reported on, whereas now it's one report every three or four years. This was brought in by the new administration, within the last five years. By now each principal has been reported on at least once. (W2.05)

> Principal evaluations are now going on, and very thoroughly. It's not something this district has had. I went for 17 or 18 years without a report, and now all of a sudden, within the last three or four years, everyone has been scheduled. (V2.11)

Cross-school exams at the secondary level had been initiated in three districts, and two of them were planning to expand the program.

> Everyone has been put on notice that next year cross-school exams will be applied to the rural Grades 8, 9, and 10 as well as to the town schools in the core academic subjects. (J1.01)

> District tests in selected core areas are new. I mentioned four tests before. Well, that is going to float around now. It will be in each grade, but there will be a different subject each year, just to try to take the temperature. (V2.03)
>
> Cross-school final examinations is only in the last two years. (R1.01)

These same three districts had recently modified their school assessment process.

> Rather than trying to totally assess the school every time, the Superintendent decided that we should break it down into a number of areas and we could look at one small area each year. (R2.06)
>
> In the last couple of years the major change has been the mandated school self-assessment program. Because we know have the common language and concept formation from our teacher effectiveness training program, we are trying to superimpose some of those strategies on our school-based assessment. (V2.10)
>
> In the early years the school evaluations were done differently. The external team arrived unannounced--they just swooped down on the school, which is how they got their name of SWAT team. There was no self-assessment. . . . It was a shattering, a hideous experience. I know that one principal had to take a sick leave after one of these evaluations. It was an ugly experience in many regards, but it has evolved into what we have now, which I call a mini-Ministry team. . . . Now there is a self-assessment process which the external team checks. It has evolved into a very thorough, meaningful process, a very worthwhile process. . . . There is no resentment, I don't see it dying or floundering ar all. It just continues to be polished a little bit, refined, and that's good. (J2.06)

Finally, in District R there was an annual program evaluation process in addition to the school assessment process, and it had undergone modification recently.

> We changed our system of program evaluation to make it more at the school's discretion which program would be assessed and how it would be done. (R1.02)

District Change Histories

As Table 6 shows, the districts had different histories with respect to school accountability practices. There are some

similarities, however, and it is possible to identify four patterns of change.

Group 1 Pattern. Districts R, J, and V had an impressive and very active history of school accountability practices. They had a number of established practices, some of which had been refined substantially in recent years. In addition, they were still introducing new practices. Their history of school accountability practices might be best described as continually evolving.

Two threads appeared to run through the changes in practice. One thread was a concern for acquiring reliable and comparative data. This was reflected in the establishment of cross-grade exams, and in development of the principal evaluation processes, which included examination of school test results and client survey data. The other thread was a movement towards greater school involvement in the monitoring process. This was reflected particularly in the changes in the program evaluation and school assessment processes.

Group 2 Pattern. Districts B and W had fewer school accountability practices than those in Group 1. Both, however, had introduced two substantial practices within the last four years. Furthermore, in each district one of the new practices reflected a concern for acquiring reliable and comparable data and the other, for greater school involvement in the monitoring process--just as in the Group 1 districts. Their history of school accountability practices might be best described as emerging.

Group 3 Pattern. Both Districts P and Q were characterized by a limited and relatively unchanging set of school acoountability

practices. Their history of school accountability practices might be best described as stable.

Group 4 Pattern. Districts C, H, and M appeared to be neophytes in the area of school accountability. They either planned to introduce or had recently introduced a district standardized testing program.

As simple as this practice was, it appeared to be a significant initial step towards holding schools accountable for their performance. In the words of one principal:

> The principals used to be able to say "my school's O.K." and blame poor district results on the fellow down the road, but they can't do that any more because they are given school-level results now. (M2.02)

In fact, the issue of school accountability in a district may not arise in any meaningful way until there is some kind of district testing program involving school-level analysis of the results. As long as data are analysed at the district level, responsibility for performance remains diffuse, and there is no compelling reason for change at any particular school.

District Monitoring Goals

The third element of Focus 2 concerns monitoring goals, and in particular, whether or not there is a shared understanding of the purpose of district monitoring practices. These findings are summarized by district in Table 7.

TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

Purposes of District Monitoring Practices

Many of the respondents alluded to the purposes of district monitoring practices, but there were not many explicit references. Certainly the most commonly cited purpose was that of using performance data to identify weaknesses and plan improvements.

> We are expected to look at the CTBS results seriously, to assess where there is a significant variance between school and district results, and to correct any discrepancies. (J2.05)
>
> I think the district administrator's clear expectations are that their recommendations will be carried out before the next evaluation. (W2.03)
>
> We have to do an analysis of test results and take a look at where the weaknesses are and set some goals and objectives for doing something about it. (Q2.01)

The second purpose was to collect reliable and objective outcome data, to have a good indicator of school performance, particularly in the core academic subjects.

> There are some fairly rigorous expectations. (Probe: Of how principals should behave?) Not of behaviour, of results [on CAT and PLAP]. We expect quality education to be delivered to the kids in this system. (P1.02)
>
> I want to find out how teachers are doing during the year. (C2.02)
>
> There has been an attempt made in this district under Board direction and by district administrative leadership . . . to try to devleop the notion of having instructional goals and objectives and of administering tests to see if those goals and objectives are being met. (V1.04)

The third goal refers to performance standards.

> I think accountability is a very high goal in the district. There is an expectation that this school district will do well, and should do well, that we should be above the provincial mean, for example. (B2.04)
>
> I think it is academic programs and how we are doing relative to the rest of the province. (R2.04)

District Patterns of Shared Monitoring Goals

The major distinction, according to Table 7, is between Districts H and M and all the others. Not only were no shared goals articulated in these two districts, but according to some of the respondents there simply were none.

> I expected the district to say "Your results were poor in such and such, what are you going to do?" But I have no sense that we were in any way answerable for our results. (M2.01)
>
> Expectations of the principals with respect to performance data are not talked about. (H1.03)

It is possible to group the remaining districts according to the number of shared monitoring goals: at least two were articulated in Districts R, B, and P; and at least one was articulated in Districts J, V, W. Q, and C. It must be remembered, however, that this probably does not reflect the true extent of shared goals, because many respondents did not explicitly state any goals, although these goals could be inferred from their described activities.

Summary

For each cell of Focus 2 the districts were assigned to one of three or four groups, depending on their overall pattern of responses. A saliency index was derived by: (a) giving the group with the most comprehensive set of practices a score of three, giving the group with the next most comprehensive set a score of two, and so on; (b) doubling

the scores for cells 2.ACC and 2.CH, because these results are more meaningful than the results from cell 2.EXP; and (c) summing the three scores. District scores for each cell and overall are presented in Table 8.

TABLE 8 ABOUT HERE

Table 8 shows that the districts were very consistent across the three cells of Focus 2. Districts R, J, and V were characterized by a strong district presence in the schools; a continually evolving set of school accountability practices; and one or more shared monitoring goals. These districts, if not "good" according to some absolute standard, are certainly, to adapt Sara Lightfoot's phrase, "good enough" (1983, p. 311). All three were high-performing districts (see Table 3).

Districts B, P, and W lacked the school assessment programs of the first group, but they nevertheless were characterized by a strong district presence in the schools; a limited set of school accountability practices which was either stable or emerging; and one or more shared monitoring goals. These districts might not yet have been "good enough," but they were certainly approaching it. District B was medium-performing, and the other two were high-performing districts.

Districts H and M were characterized by an absence of district press for school accountability; a virtual absence of a history of

school accountability practices, except for the very recent introduction of a district testing program; and an absence of shared expectations for the use of performance data. These districts, which were both low-performing, had a long way to go to be considered "good enough."

Districts G and C were characterized by a weak district presence in the schools, and one shared monitoring goal. District G had established a limited number of school accountability practices, while District C had just recently introduced a testing program. This difference may be related to the fact that District G was a high-performing district and District C was a low-performing one. The fact that both were very small and had only one district administrator, the Superintendent, in addition to the Secretary-Treasurer, may account for their similarities.

That the districts in the sample differ with respect to their practices regarding school accountability is clear. The patterns are consistent across the three elements of this focus, and are also reasonably congruent with the performance ranking of the districts: districts which are high-performing are considerably more interested and more sophisticated about school accountability.

The practices of these districts are also recognizably congruent with the "autonomy with accountability" approach to district quality control outlined in the introduction to this chapter. The delegation of authority for quality to the school level advocated by Goodlad is not yet characteristic of school districts in B.C.

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Table 1

Parallels Between Good Classrooms, Good Schools, and Good School Districts

	ACTIVITY	CLASSROOM LEVEL	SCHOOL LEVEL	DISTRICT LEVEL	FOCUS
	taking care of business	time on task	academic orientation	focus on instruction	LEARNING FOCUS
ACADEMIC PURPOSES	monitoring performance	student account.	teacher account.	school account.	ACCOUNTABILITY FOCUS
	changing policies/ practices	instructional practice	continuous improvement	organizational change	CHANGE FOCUS
	caring for stakeholders	student support	ethos of caring	consideration	CARING FOCUS
NURTURANCE PURPOSES	creating shared values	collegiality	consensus on school life	commitment to effort	COMMITMENT FOCUS
	creating community support	parents as partners	parent integration	community integration	COMMUNITY FOCUS
	LEADERSHIP				

Table 2

District Ethos and District Tasks

SIX FOCUSES (DISTRICT ETHOS)	DISTRICT TASKS A. BE ACCOUNTABLE	B. IMPROVE/ ADAPT	C. SET EXPECTATIONS
LEARNING FOCUS			
1. focus on instruction	program effectiveness assessed?	changes to improve instruction?	instructional goals most important?
ACCOUNTABILITY FOCUS			
2. school accountability	schools held accountable for performance?	changes to improve school accountability practices?	monitoring and instructional goals linked?
CHANGE FOCUS			
3. organizational change	changes as response to performance data?	changes as response to environment changes?	changes in goals/goal-setting processes?
CARING FOCUS			
4. consideration	concern for professional and community opinion on performance?	decisions reflect concerns of professionals and community?	emphasis on affective goals?
COMMITMENT FOCUS			
5. commitment to effort	commitment to accountability created?	commitment to change efforts created?	commitment to school/district goals created?
COMMUNITY FOCUS			
6. community integration	schools/district involve community in monitoring?	community involvement in change efforts?	community involvement in setting of goals?

Table 3

The Purposive Sample of B.C. School Districts

DIST.	SIZE RANGE [a]	TYPE OF COMMUNITY	RESIDUAL SCORE (RANK) [b]		RESIDUAL COSTS (RANK) [b]		PERFORMANCE RATING
R	medium	small city/rural	9.75	(1)	-330	(6)	high
Q	small	rural/small town	6.67	(6)	-409	(3)	high
W	large	small city/rural	4.65	(11)	-217	(13)	high
V	large	city/rural	4.50	(13)	-260	(11)	high
J	medium	small city/rural	2.93	(21)	-63	(20)	high
P	medium	rural/small towns	2.48	(24)	-19	(35)	high/medium
B	large	small city/urban	0.61	(36)	61	(48)	medium
H	small	rural	-2.13	(51)	541	(70)	low
M	medium	small city/urban	-6.62	(67)	401	(68)	low
C	small	rural/isolated	-13.98	(71)	891	(73)	low
			SD = 5.20		SD = 257		

[a] Size ranges: small = 1-2100; medium = 2101-5600; large = 5601-51000; 25 districts per range.

[b] Rank of 73 districts: 1 is high for achievement, low for costs.

Table 4

Inter-coder Reliability Scores (% agreement) by District

Districts	District R	J	V	B	P	W	Q	H	N	C	mean	range
2.ACC	78	78	81	76	84	85	88	89	84	91	82	76-91
2.CH	83	98	94	89	100	98	100	97	88	100	95	83-100
2.EXP	63	89	70	67	80	87	84	75	79	75	77	63-89
FOCUS 2	75	88	82	77	88	90	91	87	84	89	85	75-91

Table 5

District Practices to Make Schools Accountable

	District									
District Practices	R	J	V	B	P	W	Q	C	H	M
provide school-specific test results	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	S	+	++
indicate relative standings of schools	++	+	+	++	+	-	+	-	+	-
review internal school assessment report	++	++	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
discuss school-specific performance data	++	++	++	++	++	+	-	S	-	N
articulate expectations	++	+	+	++	++	+	S	S	N	N
monitor school use of performance data	++	++	++	++	++	++	-	S	-	-
follow up planned school improvements	++	++	DA	+	++	++	-	-	-	-

Key: ++ = mentioned by 2/3 or more of the respondents
+ = mentioned by 1/3 to 2/3 of the respondents
- = mentioned by fewer than 1/3 of the respondents
DA = mentioned by district administrators but not principals
N = specifically mentioned by more than 1/3 of the respondents that the practice did not occur
S = practice occurs, but at school rather than district initiative

Table 6

History of District School Accountability Practices

District Practices	District									
	R	J	V	B	P	W	Q	C	H	M
administration of standardized tests	E	E	E PL	IN-b PL	MO-a	E	E	IN-b	PL	IN-a PL
goal review process	IN-b	E	-	IN-a	E	IN-b	E	-	-	IN-a*
principal evaluation	E	MO-a	IN-b	E	E	IN-b	-	-	-	-
administration of cross-school exams	IN-a	IN-b PL	IN-b PL	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
school assessment process	MO-a	MO-b MO-a	MO-b	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
program evaluation	MO-b	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Key: PL = planned change
MO-a = modification 1 to 2 years ago of an established practice
MO-b = modification 3 to 4 years ago of an established practice
IN-a = introduction 1 to 2 years ago of a new practice
IN-b = introduction 3 to 4 years ago of a new practice
E = practice established for at least 5 years

* According to the principals, the follow-up stage of the process is not being carried out because of time constraints.

Table 7

Purpose of District Monitoring Practices

	District									
Purposes	R	J	V	B	P	W	Q	C	H	M
identify weaknesses; plan improvements	+	+	+	++	++	+	++	-	-	-
collect reliable and objective outcome data	+	DA	DA	++	+	-	-	++	-	-
set standards for performance	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-

Key: ++ = mentioned by 2/3 or more of the respondents
+ = mentioned by 1/3 to 2/3 of the respondents
- = mentioned by fewer than 1/3 of the respondents
DA = mentioned by district administrators but not principals
N = specifically mentioned by more than 1/3 of the respondents that the practice did not occur

Table 8

Saliency of District Monitoring Practices

School Accountability Elements	District									
	R	J	V	B	P	W	Q	C	H	M
2.ACC: district presence	6	6	6	4	4	4	2	2	0	0
2.CH: district history	6	6	6	4	2	4	2	0	0	0
2.EXP: shared goals	3	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	0	0
Saliency index *	15	14	14	11	9	10	6	4	0	0

* Saliency index is weighted sum of values assigned to district pattern of responses for each cell.